
**Edvard Snouden:
TRAJNO ZABELEŽENO**

Vulkan izdavaštvo, 2019.

[Review of the book *Permanent Record*, by E. Snowden]

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Article Information*

Book Review

Volume: 19 Issue: 1, page(s): 181–186

Received: February 19, 2022 • Accepted: March 1, 2022

<https://doi.org/10.51738/Kpolisa2022.19.1r.10b>

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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* Cite (APA):

Bokan, J. (2022). Edvard Snouden: Trajno zabeleženo. [Review of the book *Permanent Record*, by E. Snowden]. *Kultura polisa*, 19(1), 181–186. <https://doi.org/10.51738/Kpolisa2022.19.1r.10b>

Review

Edward Snowden is a systems engineer who was an employee of the Central Intelligence Agency and worked under contract for the National Security Agency. Snowden became publicly known upon exposing a series of secret and illegal acts of intrusion into the deep intimacy of each individual carried out by the “NSA” and the “CIA” in 2013, with the help of journalists from the “Guardian” and the “Washington Post”. These illegal activities mainly involved: mass surveillance programs, disrespect of independence, eavesdropping, recording, the daily undermining of innocent people’s privacy and the utmost control over the citizens of the USA and of the rest of the world. The book “Permanent Record” explains the thorny path of finding out and disclosing information, talking about the destructive power of information and communication technologies for human rights to freedom and privacy. The book is the latest testimony of Edward Snowden, which was published during his political asylum in Russia which he himself requested because he faces decades in the United States for revealing a state secret. The main objective of his awareness-raising effort was to restore citizens’ trust in institutions, whereas Snowden’s revelation of the US Government’s activities to restructure global communication networks led to continuous exposure of accountable ones to public dissatisfaction.

This book consists of two parts. The first part describes Snowden’s childhood in the multicultural Beltway, with the inhabitants predominantly coming from the diplomatic, intelligence and government corps, and with the social milieu of parents belonging to a class of professional civil servants, i.e., “shadow government”, his growing up online since he was 12, hacking for fun and the protection-of-independence related activities during his teenage years, which resulted in his poor academic success. The first part also focuses on his military enlistment and the strong urge to serve his country. The second part of the book depicts Snowden as an employee who was observing others through his Window screen, his thorough familiarisation with the system, his self-questioning, personal doubts, a conflict between the mind and the heart, his fears and eventual disclosure of confidential and well-kept secrets which may help us understand a new reality in which people are victims of their curiosity sometimes.

As Snowden was analysing the events back in 2001, he started to realize that 3000 Americans got killed during one attack, whereas half a million people

died as a consequence of the US retaliation. He lost his confidence in the US system when he got hurt during his military service, where everybody around him remained ignorant of his injury, refraining from assuming any responsibility, in spite of obvious guilt. He describes this as a moment of self-awakening after figuring out that what is not beneficial for the public is beneficial for the elite, and upon realising what China and Russia were doing publicly to their citizens by imposing censorship and dictatorship and that the USA was carrying out its secret operations throughout the world thanks to its wide-spread sovereignty, with over 90% of the internet infrastructure as well as the global internet traffic being managed by the technology belonging to the US Government and the US companies. He finally understood that if he truly wanted to serve his country, he would be able to accomplish it only by using the technology, but in the end, once he faced the truth, he felt betrayed since the “technology does not have a Hippocratic oath”, as he describes.

It was just after the CIA's series of failures in connection with 11 September 2001 that he signed an employment contract; CIA was at the time divided into five divisions: Directorate for espionage, Directorate for the analysis of espionage results, Directorate in charge of procuring communication and espionage equipment, administrative Directorate for liaison with the Government and the largest Directorate was the one for “support, which was managing the Agency's Washington-Metropolitan server architecture”, covering all the “systems that were transmitting, receiving and storing intelligence” to which he was attached (pp. 136-137). What makes these memoirs especially interesting is a detailed description of materials that Snowden had access to thanks to his profession and the privilege of being a system administrator, where these materials ranged from information about alien existence to the most kept state secrets. Snowden named a key automatized platform, verifying whether they are any unique documents, a “Signal of the Heart”, and by means of this platform, he came into possession of the documents that he further circulated among the journalists. The journalists played a crucial role in this Snowden's discovery of confidential and highly protected documents, for the disclosure of which he was facing at least 10 years of imprisonment for just one publicized document, and it is because of this, among other things, that the university professors are integrating this book into the list of mandatory and supplemental literature to be studied by the journalism students. While

reading this book, it is of extreme importance to get acquainted with the character and the work of those journalists and media that Snowden has chosen to publicize the data which he has protected with multiple encryptions. One of the most challenging tasks was to explain complex issues to the journalists in such a manner to make them comprehensible. His long-planned selection included those journalists whom the state had already marked as the “national security disruptors”. Laura Poitras is perhaps the most significant among them, since she recorded all this in her famous documentary “Citizenfour”, thanks to which this story became globally known.

When deciding about the location for meeting the journalists, Snowden opted for Hong Kong, since he considered it the safest place in the world at that particular moment, however, the Government of Hong Kong, in the months following the publication of these documents, was unable to provide him with the international protection on their territory. His second option, as a consequence, was Ecuador, but that summer the US Government revoked his passport, which is why upon reaching the first airport in Russia he started cooperating with the Russian Intelligence Service, being denied his political asylum application by 27 countries.

The main thesis of the author is that all the inhabitants of the world are monitored and that their privacy is endangered in many ways. The author does not provide an alternative to the stated position, nor does he give a lot of advice on how digital movements could be protected from surveillance and manipulation of personal data. It is important to emphasize that the author's arguments must be read and understood from an angle in which he cannot completely remove the emotional fear of persecution from the country for which he was raised to serve it in a particularly patriotic way. The author, who grew up in an environment where service to the country was highly valued and trusted, is disappointed when he learns the truth and under the impression of disappointment writes lines of a book from the political asylum of a country that is the greatest opponent of the United States. It is necessary to read the book in Aesopian terms and subject it to scientific analysis and analysis of the prevailing life, political and economic circumstances on each new page because the author's free argument can be attributed to the political views of the country where he is in the asylum. The book is deeply ideological, although it

seems that in the technological sense, ideology is of secondary importance, the author's personality is such that his internal motives drove him to performances for which he became famous, for some, and for some, he became a threat to national security.

This is the book about cyber espionage and unveiling the internet which has changed its nature and its infrastructure over the years, from its inception until today, starting from total anarchy and a large number of criteria that had to be fulfilled in order to access the network, to the provision of internet access to a half-literate person which we have nowadays. Due to the lack of familiarity with the behind-the-scenes network operations, the global spreading of digital technology has greatly facilitated the process of accessing a target by means of a computer, where an agent can use only one email with the attachment or a link (signals intelligence without any contact with the individual), and make the user accept a malware program, exposing not only himself but the entire network. CIA agents are using a search engine without any identification, but once they are tracked down it becomes apparent that the agencies are hiding behind harmless companies, with a lot of money and efforts invested in remaining undiscovered.

Most citizens become anxious when it occurs that somebody might actually be monitoring their communication, be it photographs or messages, over which they believe to have active control, however, the real truth is that the communication content is of less importance than numerous unwritten and unspoken information beyond the user control, which may point at the broader context of user behaviour, i.e. metadata about everything citizens do on their devices and what the devices do by themselves. To support his claim that all our controlled and uncontrolled activities are backed up and stored, Snowden elaborates on his work in "NASA" while being in Japan and at some other locations. He exposes a hostile aspect of the internet and of the information sharing, as well as of our internet search for the wanted information which we obtain instantly, but which comes in a package along with the surveillance program, given that any "URL" request for reaching a certain server will first have to pass through a "Turbulence", which represents a room where the agency and other stakeholders operate under a justification that the act of

sharing information with any third party legitimize their right to violate privacy, which is generally guaranteed by the Constitution.

In his book, Snowden reveals secret programs not only of targeted but also of mass surveillance that permanently collects data from citizens, hence the very title of the book, "Permanent record". Snowden has never displayed any signs of remorse for his research of active abuse and the revelation of the ordinary citizens' surveillance by the US Government and the governments of the US allies, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Great Britain, as well as by those companies, on the servers of which our data are being stored, where such data actually represent our personal property, though nowadays are the least protected. Although it sounds paradoxical that Snowden's rights are defended by a country that controls its citizens in the same way for the purposes of quasi-national security, there are numerous advantages that Russia skilfully exploited Snowden for the sake of positive publicity, for example, a kind of rebellion against the misuse of personal data has emerged in the average digital consumer, which will force him to resort to encryption systems in order to neutralize the fear of negative surveillance and the higher awareness that everything we have ever created on the network might remain stored forever and be available to "Personality analysts" whose only task is to find out as much as they can about us, if not everything, because rarely do we manage to keep anything only to ourselves as a result of our digital addiction.